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ABSTRACT

Extra-year school readiness programs, which serve as "developmental kindergartens" or "junior first grades," are well-intentioned transition programs between kindergarten and first grade that are intended to serve children judged to be at risk for early school failure. Despite their good intentions, these programs are counterproductive to an equable public education and serve neither the overwhelming majority of at-risk students nor the constituents of schooling within a democracy. Extra-year placement rates of 5 percent or more implicitly seek to segregate and track students at-risk for learning delays within the framework of nonresponsive, regular education, rather than address the characteristics of the developmental inappropriateness of kindergarten and first-grade programming. Cognitive developmental issues arise from segregated readiness environments which propagate differential cognitive growth between students who are placed in such programs and those who are promoted. Controlled studies indicate that students placed in extra-year readiness programs achieved similar levels of academic and social performance in school in subsequent grades as students who were equally unready but who were promoted ahead. Promoting at-risk students, while providing integrative programming within reorganized early education frameworks, has been shown to be more effective than passive retentions or transitional placements. However, the practice of promoting at-risk students requires a commitment to meeting the needs of all children within the framework of each classroom. A 165-item bibliography is provided. (AC)

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Extra-Year School Readiness Programs: Equity, Learning and Social Concomitants

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Abstract

Transition retentions test the equity tenets of public education by stratifying 'non-least restrictive' educational services to a growing populous of non-disabled students. Organizational and cognitive developmental issues arise from segregated readiness environments which propagate differential cognitive growth between placed and promoted populations. Policy discussions denote that extra-year placements accommodate a school's escalating literacy-based curricula and organizational structures rather than serving the authentic needs of students with common diversities. Controlled studies of extra-year readiness programs indicate placed-students achieve similar levels of school performance (academic and social) in subsequent grades as students equally unready but who were promoted ahead. Alternatives to transition programming document that at risk students can be preferably served in other than homogeneous special placements.

Extra-Year School Readiness Programs: Equity, Learning and Social Concomitants

School readiness programs are frequently accorded to children determined to be at risk for early school failure (A Gift of Time, 1982; Bohl, 1984; Frick, 1990; Friesen, 1984; Uphoff & Gilmore, 1985). Advocates of developmental kindergartens or junior first grades endeavor to solace at risk students with a maturation year before entering formal schooling (Uphoff, 1990). Extra-year programming may also be condoned in order to harbor academic deficient or developmentally delayed students from the intensifying demands of non-adaptive academic curricula of early grades (Hammond, 1986; Shepard, 1991; Solem, 1981). Additionally, transitional programming may also be conceded in order to "red-shirt" discrete children (Meisels, 1987, 1991, in press; Shepard, in press).

Transition programming is purported to be unique from simple within-grade retentions (Ames, 1985; Galloway & George, 1986). According to recent studies, up to forty percent of districts surveyed offered transition classes of one kind or another, with the majority of them planning to maintain or expand them (Cohen, 1991a; Love, Logue, Trudeau & Thayer, 1992). While recognizing qualified short-term effects, do transitional programs actuate inherent inequities of segregated facilities for placed-students? Are extra-year programs a viable option for young at risk children to help attain the first goal proposed by the National Education Goal's Panel? By chance do "growth year" programs reduce the demand for future special education or remedial services for placed students? Might transitional programmings encumber other children by unintended social, curriculum and bureaucratic consequences? Are transition-placement outcomes different from simple within-grade kindergarten or first grade retentions? Is "readiness" a problem of a child's developmental growth, a school's instructional response or a growing social condition of early childhood in America today? Do extra-year programs provide durable academic or social gains beyond a singular year of age-improved, feigned acquisitions? Are their legal consequences of extra-year placements? How do schools eliminate transition programs? This paper constructs a definable position on each of these questions.

Philosophy of extra-year practices. Speculatively, extra-year school readiness programming engender that: a) inclusive interventions designed to improve young students' delayed status are not as desirable as retention; b) placed-students solely require more time to mature in order to be able to work through curriculum material, a

time table that can not be altered; c) identification and placement determinations are defensible in terms of the learning and social outcomes of children placed; d) extra-year programmings are unobtrusive in terms of the eventualities on the instruction of children not placed; e) restructured early educational programming is less desirable than extra-year placements; f) schools have the public sanction to segregate identified children into readiness placements, and g) school readiness is a child-oriented determination (Ames, 1985; Kagan, 1992a; Shepard, in press).

Transitional placements project a philosophy of early education that premises "teachers are powerless to work academically with children until children spontaneously achieve school readiness behaviors" (Meisels, 1987, p. 69).[1] Such programs offset placed-children from general and often formal academic instructional environments, ear marking them as "non-ready learners" (Kagan, 1990). Readiness room practices also presuppose a consideration of a student's readiness to learn as a legitimate concept (Goal 1: Problem or promise?, 1992; Johnston, 1991; Kagan, 1990, 1992b). Such a focus of students' failure, as opposed to schools' appropriate instructional response, as a primary axis of concern however, appears mis-placed amidst most recent early childhood policies discussions (Kagan, 1992; Karweit, 1991b; Shepard, 1992; Smith & Shepard, 1987).

Corollaries of a growth year practice. As Resnick recently notes, contrary to democratic and mobility-oriented premises within American commitments, a dominant school agenda has apparently sold American parents on the supposition that their children are to be sorted (Resnick, Scriven, Wolcott, Porter & Brewer, 1991). Within the last few years however, a considerable focus has been placed on the deleterious social effects of developmental placement programming (Shepard, 1991), especially in the midst of our growing multilayered student audiences (Levine, 1990) and Regular Education Initiative debates (Skrtic, 1991).

The social-developmental needs of unready students do not appear to be met by year-long, transitional pullout-placements. Placing identified children into a single classroom, within a reduced academic environment for an entire year, regardless of children's social or achievement growth patterns over the course of their year's placement has been questioned as a beneficial educational or developmental practice (Meisels, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1988; Steinberg, 1990). Characteristically, transitioned populations reflect categorical and statistically different sample attributes than promoted populations: lower socioeconomic status, greater percentage of minorities, lower cognitive abilities, increased percentage of problematic social behaviors, poorer attention spans, and gender differences, (Eads, 1990; Laidig, 1991; Mantzicopoulos, Morrison, Hinshaw & Carte,

1989; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1990; Porwancher & De Lisi, 1992; Walsh, Ellwein, Eads & Miller, 1991). Treatment effects from such homogeneous environments are notoriously ill-fated (Anderson & Pellicer, 1990; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Safer, 1986; Slavin, 1987; Slavin, 1990; Slavin, 1991; Slavin, Karweit & Madden, 1989; Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989).[2] Notwithstanding, outcome findings from a state-wide study of Virginia's transitioned students involving thousands of students (Eads, 1990, p. 4) suggest that transitional first grade programming may "serve to increase differences in cognitive performance" between retained and promoted populations. (Italics Eads)

Social repercussions. The social impact of extra-year programming on children from lower socioeconomic and ethnic minority groups may even be more significant. Their access to educational alternatives prior to kindergarten (i.e., preschool, delayed entry, enriched home environments) is less than in most middle-class families. As such, these at risk children enter kindergarten based upon their chronological age rather than enhanced developmental age profiles. Furthermore, many subsidized day care and preschool programs mandate that children age five enter kindergarten are not allowed to repeat a year in a pre-school setting. Recent studies clearly indicate that students from at risk social groups are younger than middle class whites at entrance to kindergarten (e.g., Cosdon and Zimmer, 1991; Laidig, 1991; Shepard, in press). This resultant gridlock of "less ready children" is then more likely to be placed in alternative, extra-year settings. Also, their parents may be less knowledgeable in considering or even conceptualizing school readiness issues. High poverty schools do denote higher rates of transition classes (Love, Logue, Trudeau & Thayer, 1992). As such, transition retentions may be differentially being placed upon a susceptible strata of children in America.

Parents of children placed may also passively adopt the belief that their children's extra year placement is all that is needed as they have been explicitly told by maturationists- "a solid foundation will be laid for future success in school experiences" (Frick, 1990; Galloway & George, 1986; Grant, 1986; Hammond, 1986). As such, these parents may withhold interactivist roles with their children, which are important determinants in early academic outcomes (Bloom, 1988; Sigel, 1985; Swick, 1988). Transition placements may unintentionally create interactive-role differentiations for the parents of transitioned-placed child.

A junior school environment. Readiness placements typically employ a watered down standard of curriculum and instruction. Such practices may deprive young children of cognitively-enriched environments (see Table 1), contrary to the recommended early

childhood educational practices (Bredekamp, 1987; Engel, 1991; Levin & Hopfenberg, 1991; Meisels, 1989b; School Readiness Task Force, 1988). Such placements may also negatively impact on student academic outcomes, particularly on young at risk students (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 1990; Jenkins, Pious & Peterson, 1988; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991; Slavin, Karweit and Madden, 1989).

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition, placed-children's "learning mind set" may be distorted. Transition-placements may promote a future ready acceptance of remedial instruction rather than a working through of normal proficiency stresses that occur with learning new and often difficult material. Placed-students may expect to engage or involve themselves in complementary learning environments that are separate and easier than regular education programming. This, and the fact that parents and teachers have informed placed-students that their special placement will be "good" for them (Smith & Shepard, 1988), may present placed-students with negative learning predispositions.

The school-imposed declaration that thirty percent of children need an extra year or are "deficit" in some way, seems institutionally manipulative to a growing number of developing and pluralistic children and their families (Meisels, 1991; School Readiness, 1992). Early grade teachers generally teach curriculum-driven literacy formats when given the endorsement by administrators that students who are not able to meet promotion standards should enter the next grade with an extra-year of schooling. Readiness retentions increase the need to serve more undeclared at risk students in future segregated "special service" placements (Meisels, in press). This due to escalating curricula and regular education teacher's resultant narrowing perceptions of optimal class variances of expected student learning (and of learning styles) in kindergarten and first grade.

A detrimental policy. Kindergarten teachers are generally relieved to have students who performed poorly have an opportunity for an extra year's growth (Smith & Shepard, 1988). First grade teachers customarily applaud extra-year programming because it reduces the number of children entering their classrooms ill-prepared. Yet, between these two curriculum levels, transitional placements seemingly exclude the very opportunity for adaptive, integrative or inclusive models of programming to serve the growing variances of children's' developmental needs in early education settings. By their very existence, transition rooms may reduce the perceived need for regular education teachers and administrators to respond to children's normal range of performance differences within regular early educational classroom environments.

Policy discussions clearly suggest the pre-eminent reasons for the increasing number of early retention practices rest in serving a schools' grade-level, skill-based curricula and a promotional grade-level structure rather than children's normal range of instructional needs (Allington, 1990; Billman, 1988; Dean, 1992; Ellwein, Walsh, Eads & Miller, 1991; Freeman, 1990; House, 1990; Kamii, 1990; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991; Reynolds, 1991; Schiller, 1991; Shepard, 1991; Shepard, in press; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Slavin, et al., 1991; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Turnbull, 1990; Walsh, 1990; Willer & Bredekamp, 1990). The term "readiness delay" seemingly requisitions a linear correspondence with increased academic demands and a developmental inappropriateness of what and how it is being taught in today's early grades (Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Drew, 1991; Monson & Pahl, 1991; Vann, 1991).

Unacceptable legal consequences. Developmental placements strongly infer ability placements, only "euphemistically legitimized" (Kagan, 1990). They may also lessen opportunities for accessing current or future mainstream educational opportunities (e.g., restraining their access to early literacy, knowledge and formative social experiences in school). This, particularly for minorities and those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds placed (Cohen, 1991a; Eads, 1990; Mantzicopoulos, Morrison, Hinshaw & Carte, 1989; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1990; Walsh, 1990; Walsh, Ellwein, Eads & Miller, 1991).

School board policies, transition room brochures or parental retention sign-off forms which explicitly state "this placement will improve, increase or better your child's future success in school", misrepresent such placements as beneficial in blind contrast to the empirical evidence. Advocating transition placements as beneficial, especially when compared to the controlled research evidence, may also foretell of possible litigation issues reflected in mis-representation, inappropriate services, or denied rights for which schools ought to be held accountable (House, 1990; House, 1989, p. 212).

Further cause for alarm is the argument that young children's exposure to early social-cultural, literacy and enrichment opportunities plays a highly significant role on readiness test profiles (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1988; Gifford, 1989; Gifford & O' Connor, 1990; NAEYC, 1988). Assessment instruments used in determining a child's "school readiness" often reflect grossly inadequate reliability and validity in making educational decisions regarding a child's preparedness for academic instruction (Walsh, Ellwein, Eads & Miller, 1991; Ferguson, 1991b; Graue, 1992; Graue & Shepard, 1989; Kamii, 1990; Kirst, 1991; Lichtenstein, 1990; Meisels, 1987; Meisels, 1989a; NAEYC,

1988; Perrone, 1991; Sheepard & Smith, 1986). Readiness tests administered to children at the age of four and five, are at best, crude estimates of children's true actualizing potential for current or future learning. In non-restrictive samples, upwards of forty percent of minorities reflect eligible assessment criteria for transition placement (Neill & Medina, 1989). As such, discriminatory segregative practices are likely to result from readiness test use (Cohen, 1991b; Kamii, 1990; Perrone, 1991). In districts where a second year of transitional placement has been offered, minorities are even further over represented than in the first placement (Eads, 1990; Walsh, Ellwein, Eads & Miller, 1991).

Such legal vulnerabilities taint extra-year programming with a variety of pernicious issues (Billman, 1988; Ellwein, Walsh, Eads & Miller, 1991; House, 1990; Karweit, 1991; Popham & Mehrens, 1991). Under consistent evidence of no beneficial effects for transition programming, such an option no longer seems to command a professional respect as an enrichment itinerary to help at risk children (Meisels, 1991). Without evidence of positive effects, the question then becomes one of fairness, opportunity and equal access to appropriate public education for all students (Levine, 1990). In legal circles, transitional placements may not even be seen as a recourse of choice (Billman, 1988; Goodlad and Oakes, 1988; Trimble & Sinclair, 1987).

Research outcomes. Citing anecdotal accounts, maturationists claim support for their extra-year initiative (A Gift of Time, 1982; Ames, 1985; Bear & Modlin, 1987; Bohl, 1984; Carll & Richard, no date; Frick, 1990; Friesen, 1984; Grant, 1986). Among controlled investigations however, no study denotes significant positive effects (academic or social/behavioral) beyond the first grade for transitioned-placed samples over comparison samples of elligible, equally unready/at risk, and often recommended for transition placement students (e.g., Banerji, 1990; Beckman & Reiner, 1985; Boettger, 1991; Bredekamp & Sheppard, 1988; Brewer, 1990; Dolan, 1982; Ferguson, 1991; Gredler, 1984; Jones, 1985; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1991; May & Welch, 1984a; 1984b; Meisels, 1989a; Mossburg, 1987; Shepard, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Zinski, 1983).

Investigative studies have ranged from longitudinal research designs, to ex post facto causal-comparative studies with unanimous conclusions. Although no meta-analysis study (e.g. Holmes, 1989; Karweit, 1991), has yet to isolate these two dozen transitional studies (see Ferguson, 1991b; Shepard, 1989), separate from simple within-grade retention studies, the reviews of transition-placement studies have formed consensus perspectives:

> Research indicates that transition room children either do not perform as well or at most are equal in achievement levels to transition room eligible children placed in regular classes. (Gredler, 1984, p. 469)
>
> Children who spend an extra year before first grade are just as likely to end up at the bottom of their first or third grade class as unready children who refused the special placement. (Shepard, 1989, pp. 75-76)

As representative of the outcome effects of transitional programming, a recent study of the author's, reviewed in Education Week, Educational Research Newsletter, and Growing Child Research Review (Ferguson, 1990, 1991a; 1991b), noted ninety-six percent of transition-placed students were achieving above grade level (i.e., spring kindergarten student norms) at the end of their transitional first grade placement, well above their year younger, to be promoted kindergarten peers. Nevertheless two years after their readiness placement, sixty-five percent of placed-students exhibited standardized achievement scores below the second grade district-level mean.[3] By second grade, forty percent of placed-students had or were receiving district remedial reading services (independent of their transition programming), and more than twice as many had been referred for special education services or social skills services (again, independent of their extra-year programming), than their year younger, non-retained (or considered for placement) classmates. Placed-students received special education services at three times the rate of the promoted non-at risk population since transition placement. On eight measures of behavioral outcomes, some obtained from blind teacher ratings, the placed-students failed to indicate a significant social advantage over equally at risk and recommended for placement second grade classmates, who were promoted directly out of kindergarten without an extra-year. Placed-students did however, achieve a significantly ($p < .03$) unfavorable teacher rating on the domain of 'aggressiveness' than the promoted, at risk comparison-sample students.

In respect to academic outcomes, the transitioned-sample did not fair a significant advantage over the control at risk sample on four measures of standardized academic outcomes nor from two academic performance measures from the blind teacher ratings. On five district-level indicators of related service referrals or placement rates, the transition students failed to indicate a superior advantage over the comparison sample. The performance skid of transitioned-students within the two year time frame from the spring of their transitional grade placement, to the spring of second grade, in standardized academic terms was a 1.76 standard deviation slid. Students fell from the district's 87th percentile ranking at the end of transition placement (spring kindergarten norms) to the 27th percentile ranking at the end of second grade (district spring second grade norms). By the end of second grade, more than half of the placed-students were enrolled in

remedial, support and/or special education services, with no discernable difference in placement rates from the control, comparison at risk sample, non-placed and a year younger. By fourth grade, placed-students still remain similar to non-placed students in terms of the standardized achievement profile across the two samples.[4]

In practice, growth year programming however coquetish to kindergarten teachers, concerned parents, academic-minded principals, maturationists, wishful consultants or anxious first grade teachers, the adventure is unquestionably not endorsed by the research outcomes (Doyle, 1989; Karweit, 1991; Meisels, 1991; Natale, 1991; Schultz, 1989, Shepard, 1989; Shepard, 1991; Shepard, in press). Furthermore, the outcomes do not differ from the pathetic effects well noted in kindergarten or first grade retention studies (Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1989). Attentiveness, academics nor behavioral student outcomes are improved by either transitional or retention placements.

A few transition students do however, appear to sustain benefits from their extra-year placement. Whether or not these isolate students would have eventually emerged into competence without retention is unresolved and heavily laden with measurement, placement and 'best practices' equity issues (Laidig, 1991). In this respect, the characteristics of at risk populations suggest that among placed-students, those who fail to persist in any longitudinal achievement outcomes are likely to do so with or without a 'growth year' (Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1990). And likewise, among the few placed-student who do achieve and sustain academics, their 'resilient student' persistence may be robust enough to obtain eventual successful school achievement without extra-year placement.

In answer to the educational question of how best to serve the needs of children assessed as not ready, the segregated 'growth year' practice is clearly not a preferred choice among options (Brewer, 1990; Cohen, 1991a; Dawson & Rafoth, 1991; Graue, 1992; Holloman, 1990; Meisels, 1991; Olson, 1990; Rothman, 1990a; 1990b; Texas won't fail kindergartners: Transitional classes barred, 1990)). As Holmes and Matthews (1984, p. 232) noted, the legitimacy of the extra-year effort, "falls on proponents of retention plans to show there is compelling logic...". Such logic is not found.

Alternatives to failing kindergarten. There is no doubt that large portions of students are experiencing, in the spring of their kindergarten year a restricted range of skill-based repertoires and are in need of accommodating instructional/curriculum approaches (Drew, 1991; Meisels, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1988). Accommodating remedial or

special services is however, an adult concern and responsibility. At risk students need not suffer the ill-effects of providing non-integrative, inclusive or developmental programming or no programming at all. There are alternatives to 'slow-learner', readiness-room placements or 'back of the room' isolations, even midst transitional times.

Despite the noteworthy efforts of transition teachers, restructuring such changes requires schools to see the excellence of developmental programming for all children. Districts recognizing the futility of transition programming, are faced with the challenging tasks of restructuring their early grade programming. Escalated curricula, the need for wide-sweeping programmatic changes, budgetary cutbacks, accountability, program evaluation needs, teacher's comfort with a more narrow range of students' performance levels, basal programming for 'finite repertories', the important professional need to communicate the known poor efficacy of readiness programming outcomes to both parents and teachers, and the difficulties of re-visioning effective practices may however forestall program setting actions (Cohen, 1991a; Meisels, 1991; Natale, 1991).

Districts with five or more percent of their students being segregated in readiness rooms can not simply prohibit such retentions, without first creating a more felicitous curriculum environment (Cohen, 1991a). 'Head start' programs, within the context of present-day, hegemonic instructional structures are prone to dissipated short-term effects (Gallagher & Ramey, 1987). Adding a two-year multi-aged kindergarten for all students, although beneficial to many students, in truth may even widen the performance gap between at risk students and those who excel early in schooling, entailing further dilemmas of 'gating' issues for those students judged "not ready" at the end of a second year of kindergarten.

Restructuring early education. Promoting at risk students ahead, while providing integrative programming within reorganized early education frameworks have been shown to be more effective than passive retentions or transitional placements (Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989; Kagan, Rivera & Lamb-Parker, 1991; Leinhardt, 1980; Levin & Hopfenberg, 1991; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Peterson, 1989; Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987; Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1990; Slavin, Karweit & Madden, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1987; Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989; Vergason & Anderegg, 1991). These re-defined and sometimes inventive early education practices are often flexible enough to reconcile the various shortcomings that most, but not all at risk children exhibit (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1991). Most

importantly however, this programming demonstrates a commitment to a common vision in a school's organization to meet the needs of all children within the framework of each classroom and evolves from a revisioning (see Table 2) of how best to educate all children together (Bredekamp, 1987; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Hillard, 1991; Kagan, 1992a; Karweit, 1992b; Shepard, 1991).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Through implementation of effective schools programs, school improvement strategies and reform practices (Bergen, Sladeczek, Schwartz & Smith, 1991; Bredekamp, 1987; Drew & Law, 1990; Gredler, 1992; Position Statement on School Readiness, 1990; Right From The Start, 1988; School Readiness Task Force, 1988; Slavin & Madden, 1987; Slavin, Karweit & Madden, 1989; Turnbull, 1990), many schools do not reflect lower achievement profiles in early grades and have in fact demonstrated sustained positive effects on at risk students' achievements, especially in the area of reading, without retention. Furthermore, the majority of early grade teachers, including previous Gesellian-trained teachers, appear to acknowledge positive support for the revised strategies. Inservice workshops, task force meetings and collaborative teacher/administrative involvements were implemented in the schools examined (Ferguson, 1991b). These strategies were enlisted in order to promote an open dialogue of communication and possible recognition of understandings among often disparate early education philosophies, and in order to personally and meaningfully re-vision services for at risk students within the context of each local school setting (Ferguson, 1991b; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1985; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Smith & Shepard, 1988).[5]

Cognitive and social chaos due to insensitive initial conditions. The increased academic and hegemonic slope of kindergarten programming seemingly presumes a narrowing distribution of young learners it primarily serves. The fact that many young children in curriculum-driven programs are able to fly through basal curricula does not signify that such hierarchy, swift-pace schooling is beneficial nor appropriate for all young children in America (Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991). Basal kindergarten programming naively presumes, intrudes and clearly imposes that children in kindergarten are uniform in maturational, cultural, learning style, cognitive development as well as parenting commitments from home. The educational assumptions underlying basal approaches to early learning have been soundly challenged in America (Hiebert, 1988; Kagan, 1992b; Kamii, 1985; Karweit, 1992a; Shepard, 1991; Smith & Shepard, 1987).

Those who ask early education classrooms to transmit a coherent traditional knowledge may not yet discern a present day discordance between such a canonist message and a growing pluralistic audience within our public schools (Cohen, 1992; Rose, 1990). Today's young students reflect messy realities of single, two-career, young and cultural diverse backgrounds of family structures. The family unit itself is besotted with a litany of pluralistic changes and traditional value deteriorations. By some accounts, the current statistic is that less than twenty percent of school age children come from families amid traditional two-parent, non-divorced domicile settings and some seventy percent of parents extensively use day care services (Cook, 1990). Such restructured family observances may demand a likewise denouement from our schools. If schools' loco parentis responsibilities are to achieve excellence of its' intended outcome, then schools may need to see through the malaise of their fostered and impoverished special placement responses.

To retain an orthodox classroom disposition of an ideally ready student, in an ideally operational stage of development, and an idyllic hierarchy of sequential skills to be quickly learned in a half-day kindergarten, by students with presupposed pro family systems and values, inevitably retains segregationist, special service structures. If weak or lack of deep re-structuring efforts are unyielding, an increasing number of at risk students will fall within such canonist, remedial infrastructures that do not work. Moreover, such student failures may not be solely perceived in the context of students' achievement perceptions, but by students' own personas in subjective orientations of poor self-competency (Levine, 1990), giving early rise to students' dis-enfranchisement dynamics within non-responsive school environments.

The rise of the transition initiative is seemingly a by-product of a tragic misunderstanding of the spurious content of a knowledge-based curricula and stilted school structures. Such stodgy curricula and instructional structures do not serve all children and seriously misconstrue the changing complexion of our student populous (Levine, 1990). The social corollaries of increasing, non-least restrictive, segregated special configurations for growing numbers of children are deeply alarming (Levin, 1990; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991; Sirotnik & Oakes, 1986; Skrtic, 1991). Furthermore, there will always be a robust distribution of students' performance inconsistencies across most content areas at any grade or age level, and vice versa... at any skill level there will be a extended variance of age and grade ranks. Special placements policies initiated for the normal performance annoyances of young children can only serve to undermine and disfigure regular education offerings to fewer and fewer children (States Must End Special Ed's Isolation- NASBE Says, 1992).

School organization and student failure. The return of the sizable majority of transition students to an at risk status in subsequent grades is the return of identified students to their basal schooling experiences. Conditionally, their year's time out is just that- a time out. In practical terms, our early educational programming is defective for a growing number of at risk students, serving only those students who achieve imposed standards, authorized by basal curricula and hegemonic staff. In administrative terms, our public schools neglect equitable and effective practices in favor of a belief that justifies ritualized, remedial specializations. In restructuring terms, schools miss revisioning opportunities in favor of antiquated reforms. Most alarming however is the organization of schooling which has labeled thirty percent of entering students as needing such special placements (Meisels, 1991, in press; School Readiness, 1992).

Providing an extra-year for identified children endeavors to affirm the legitimacy of a public schooling paradigm that attempts to filter thirty percent of entering students into specializations. By removing this distasteful anomaly of "unready students" from regular programming, schools by chance undertake to preserve and perhaps justify the woeful inadequacies of non-adaptable communication, belief and social systems of public education instruction. Additionally such "transitional" programming removes the very subject for inventive repertoires that could help schools adapt regular instructional/curricula programming to serve all students (Skrtic, 1990, p. 169).

Amid the framework reference of our early educational programming, the "problem issue" of readiness can be contextually seen for what an anomaly may actually reveal- a dysfunctional system. Such a need to special program thirty percent of our children, discloses "deep structural flaws" in our schools (Skrtic, 1991, p. 175). Ritualized, decoupled specializations and remedial placements, in turn present teachers with the belief that students' common diversities are a deficit, and presumes regular education is a non-adaptable "finite repertoire of standard programs" (Skrtic, 1991, p. 177; Smith & Shepard, 1987, p. 134).[6]

Summary

Transitional programming presupposes child pathology where it is seemingly not. Analogous programming also preserves bureaucratic structures which are dysfunctional according to the contemporary writings of Cuban, Labaree, Lilly, Lipsky, Oakes, Reynolds, Skrtic and Stainback. By adding a transitional year, schools increase their ritualisms of basal curricula and grade promotion structures rather than accommodate students'

common learning style diversities, developmental variances, teachers' capability for wider instructional repertoires or re-structure a bureaucracy.

Albeit inspired to truly serve the needs of at risk students, the actuality that a school's foremost response for non-performing students is to identify and place them in segregated special classrooms within the framework of non-responsive, regular education infrastructures, is deleterious for all children. Readiness is not the real issue at hand. Neither is the argument that transitional programs do not work for at risk students.

Transition extra-year programs are counterproductive to an equable public education and serve neither the overwhelming majority of at risk students nor the constituents of schooling within the context of a democracy which serves all children. Growth-year placement rates of five percent or more, implicitly seek to homogeneously group, disintegrate instruct, in-class track, ability group, basal instruct and 'pullout' delayed students, rather than address the characteristics of the developmental inappropriateness of kindergarten and first grade programming. Paradoxically, transition placements may actually serve to proliferate the destitution of future at risk students within schools that embrace readiness, extra-year structures.

The maturational extra-year response is a passionate and well-intended rejoinder directed towards the special needs of a growing number of young children. Lamentably however, it is a response, which by it's very singular and linear reply, reinforces and bolsters regular educational instructional and organizational formats which are unacceptable for all children. The premise that extra-year programming leads to benefits being maintained are without empirical foundations and should be disregarded until at such time defensible research is available to support such claims.

The American 2000 challenge at hand is the organizational dynamics and instructional, curriculum concepts of educational excellence which recommends such impotent extra-year programming for thirty percent of its students. The requisition is the reshaping of our school practices through the circularity of organizational structures, reciprocal beliefs in students, ourselves and our integrative, collaborative commitment of teaching all students together.

Notes

[1] Incongruous from maturationist positions (e.g., Ames, Gesell) are interactionist, cognitive-developmental, socio-cognitive and connectionist orientations of early human development/learning. While not forming a consensus position, these theorists (e.g., Bereiter, Bronfenbrenner, Davydov, Dewey, Garner, Karmiloff-Smith, Piaget, Vygotsky) generally suggest that children best grow into higher levels of development midst integrated, instructional designs with salient social-interactive importances not usually found within compensatory, homogeneous placements (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Sternberg, 1984; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1985). Within constructive-developmentalist surroundings, the social environments of classrooms are seen as the essential change agents- "...designing instruction for children, especially instruction which has some hope of reaching children often left behind in the education process, must be thought of as creating systems of social interactions" (Newman, Griffin & Rose, 1989, pp. 136-137).

[2] Delayed entrance student populations and students retained in kindergarten or first grade fair similar non-robust follow-up academic outcomes as those of transition samples (Ferguson, 1991b; Holmes, 1989; Laidig, 1991; Shepard, 1989).

[3] This study was reviewed in Education Week, (April 17, 1991, p. 8), Educational Research Newsletter, (September/October, 1991, p. 2) and Growing Child Research Review, (September, 1991, pp. 1-2). Seventeen percent of placed-students' initial score on the Metropolitan Readiness Tests (Pre-Reading Composite) administered in the fall of their extra-year placement were however above the mean for a random sample of district students who were promoted directly into first grade (not considered for extra-year placement). As such, the proportion of transitioned-placed students who exhibited an initial Metropolitan score below the mean of the promoted sample (and thus deemed at risk), and who at the end of second grade measured below the district's second grade mean achievement level (SRA-Total Composite) was seventy-nine percent. This study (Ferguson, 1991a, 1991b) used same grade, different age comparisons and also reported the longitudinal outcomes of delayed-entry and retained (kindergarten, first or second grade) students in addition to transitioned, transitioned recommended and two random samples of promoted, non at risk students.

[4] The author's study also correlated student's age (month metrics) with second grade standardized achievement outcome, and showed an inverse (-.40) relationship

(Ferguson, 1991b). This correlation suggests that younger placed-children do better academically in future grades than older-placed, at risk children. The same age-achievement correlation for the random sample of promoted, non-retained or at risk students was a positive .18. Do older transitioned-students ready themselves with 'growth year' retentions? (Correlations reflect the obtained scores, unadjusted for range restriction attenuation.)

[5] Pensively, a school's high transition placement rate may serve to underscore the magnitude of a school's dysfunctionality in early childhood instruction. A hidden meaning of such high transitional placements may be the scandalous privacy that typically traps teachers within their classroom borders of basal curricula and instruction. The silence of a high retention rate potentially mirrors a pedagogic oppression and alienation that early grade teachers may be enduring. Retention recommendations serving as teachers' fruitless act of liberation from such basal suffrage. Crafting holistic and systemic changes from retention practices involves empowerments of teachers to professional reflect on their own appropriate uses as teachers (Karweit, 1992b). The same can be said for students (Skinner & Belmont, 1991). The dialogues of such learning linkages of teachers and students imposes new dynamics of trust, visioning, and teachers' and students' emancipation from subordinate roles of bondage (Richardson, 1990). Talk and dialogue however, is as different as teaching and learning may be.

[6] Schools addressing the controversies of restructuring early education programming may wish to closely examine the organizational dynamics of forestalled efforts. It may be that the quintessence of the problem has little to do with the often disparate issues of early childhood education. The true pariah could be elements <u>within</u> bureaucratic configurations encumbering discursive dialogue, inhibiting collaborative adaptability, and scapegoating envoys of qualitative, "bottom-up" reform.

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Table 1

Junior Programming Within Extra-Year Readiness Rooms

- Less academic instructional time
- Pygmalion expectations
- Slow it down and make it concrete curriculum orientations
- Fragmented or variations from general education instructional environments
- Devalued student self-concepts due to retention
- Homogeneous lower-ability groupings
- Skill, drill and practice response instructional formats
- Labeling of students
- Ambiguous obligations for students' improvement
- Content-free workbooks
- Lack of prominent student role models
- Male gender oriented student behaviors
- Absence of achievement standards or expectations within a developmental environment
- Lack of an explicit strategy for academic instruction

Table 2

Analogous Vision Shift of 'Education Excellence'

ARCHAIC MODEL	RESTRUCTURED MODEL
'separate but equal' remediation	'integrative collaborative/cooperative' instruction
'control-based' teaching	'reciprocities of co-existing interactions'
'hierarchical sequenced tasks'	'whole of knowledge, learning and language'
'principal-controlled'	'team-management'
'follow the leader'	'inventive risking'
'specialized specialist'	'generalist/collaborativist'
'bureaucratic organizations'	'adhocratic/discursive coupling'
'talk and instruction'	'dialogue and learning'

This shift in focus represents a major transformation in power and equity frameworks of schooling (Richardson, 1990; Sirotnik & Oaks, 1986; Skrtic, 1991; Toffler, 1990). Discussions of a prevailing paradigm can however, and often does raise resistance and confrontation clashes from individuals and small constituencies who reject any 'anomaly disclosure' (or the very inquiry into the possibility thereof) that may infer their paradigm is (or might be) faulted. Corrective measures undertaken to change current practices (e.g. supervision, transitional programming, basal curricula) may serve to accentuate the seminal need of true restructuring dynamics- dialogue and adaptability, as seemingly argued by Bacharach, Cuban, Labaree, Oakes, Richardson, Schon, Shepard, Sirotnik and Skrtic. This process of systemic organization change notes similar dynamics as those of individual therapy (Richardson, 1992).

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